

# In Canberra, as it is in Rome: here come the Jesuits

The newly crowned Pope has raised the profile of an order with links to power in Australia.

By Damien Murphy  
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The election of Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio last month as leader of the world's billion Catholics delivered a litany of firsts - he was the first to take the name Francis, the first Pope from South America and he was the first Jesuit.

Unique among Catholic religious orders, Jesuits take a fourth vow. While they all promise poverty, chastity and obedience, only Jesuits pledge obedience to the Pope.



Leading the way: Pope Francis is the first Jesuit to hold office. REUTERS

So Pope Francis surprised everyone, not least Australian Jesuits.

"We were set up to serve the Pope, not be one," says Greg O'Kelly, a Jesuit priest who is also the Bishop of Port Pirie diocese in South Australia. "We're taken aback somewhat."



Jesuit influences: Tony Abbott and Barnaby Joyce are both old Ignatians. ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

A religious order founded in the 16th century and perhaps experienced by few apart from the very rich and the very poor, the Jesuits have been anointed with their own adjective and a popular dictum - "give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man" - that resonates in modern life as the inspiration for the *Seven Up* long-running television documentary.

Coincidentally with a Jesuit pontiff, Australians are poised for their own Jesuit experience. The separation of church and state may be a given, but through a mix

of masculine Christianity and svelte intellectualism, the Jesuits seem to have been able to hard-wire a large slice of the next shift of political leaders.

If Tony Abbott wins the federal election, 20 per cent of his likely ministry are products of a Jesuit education. Abbott, and his possible deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce, attended St Ignatius' College, Riverview.

Such "power behind the throne" is a curious achievement, given Jesuits retain a reputation as rebels. Like many religious orders, their future is increasingly unclear - there are 138 Australians but no novitiates are taking the decade-long course for ordination as a priest - and the path of the royal commission into sex abuse is unpredictable.

But Jesuits have always had a tumultuous history.

The order was founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, a Basque soldier given to visions. Martin Luther had 23 years earlier nailed his theses to the Wittenberg church door and crank-started the Protestant Reformation. With the Catholic Church's hegemony over Christianity under challenge, Loyola's new crew became a leading edge of the Counter-Reformation. The papal bull establishing the order named its task as the "propagation and defence of the faith and the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine".

Apart from his ace in the hole of pledging total obedience to the Pope, Loyola also understood the need to "grow the market" and put missionary work front and centre. Francis Xavier, one of the five other men who joined Loyola to start the Jesuits in a Parisian church, famously went on to open up the Asian territory to Christianity.

The head of the Society of Jesus, the Father General, is colloquially called "the Black Pope". It's a pejorative term, shaped by the Jesuit's remarkable history. Although they dismiss such terms as "God's marines", Jesuits were reviled and routinely portrayed as unshaven and Semitic. Over the centuries, the order was suppressed and banished. Switzerland, for instance, kicked out Jesuits in 1848, allowing them back only in 1973. Initially, much of the fear and loathing resulted from the Jesuit performance as a hit squad during the Counter-Reformation. Besides, maybe there was a touch of envy. Jesuits were far better educated than most contemporary clergy and their intellectual dexterity and talent for fitting morals to suit the occasion, arguing on a case-by-case basis against principles or rules, infuriated many and gave rise to the abusive adjective "jesuitical".

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## ***“Abbott's Coalition ministry is shaping as a kind of Jesuit jamboree.”***

(Little wonder then that the ability to switch positions surfaced in Jesuit school debating teams, a skill coincidentally much admired among politicians).

Curiously, since the reforms that followed Vatican II in the 1960s, and the liberation theology that came with it, the order has been perceived by some as anti-establishment, even socialist: South American Jesuits carried machineguns and bullet belts under their cassocks and were routinely accused of fermenting the Castro revolution.

Revolution in Europe brought Jesuits to Australia. In 1848, with Jesuits being expelled all over the continent, German settlers in South Australia asked for chaplains. The head of the Jesuits in Austria sent two priests. They established a mission in Clare Valley. The winery they founded to produce sacramental wine at Sevenhills is still running.

In Melbourne the gold rush was starting to become unhurried. When it started in 1851, there were about 9000 Catholics in the new colony of Victoria. Thousands of Irish Catholics had fled the Irish famine or completed convict sentences in Sydney and Tasmania and went to the city by the Yarra to work in service. By 1865 there were 100,000 Catholics in Melbourne. Most were poor. Two Irish Jesuits arrived that year.

Unlike the Austrians, theirs was an urban mission. They opened what became known as Richmond Mission. The Jesuits are still there. St Ignatius' on Richmond Hill is one of Melbourne's more famous churches. They also assumed charge of St Patrick's College, which had closed in a bankrupt state three years earlier. It was an important acquisition. Situated next to Melbourne's Gothic revival-style St Patrick's Cathedral, it allowed the Jesuits to sit in the pocket of the Catholic archbishop and play a continuing role in the political development of Australia after federation. On another commanding hill in Kew, the Jesuits founded Xavier College in 1872.

Six years later the Jesuits hit Sydney. They set up a mission in North Sydney which endures as the Parish of Our Lady of the Way, North Sydney/Lavender Bay and Kirribilli. In 1879, they opened the forerunner of St Aloysius' College, Kirribilli. St Ignatius' College, Riverview, began in 1880.

Father Andrew Hamilton, consulting editor of *Eureka Street* and a policy officer for Jesuit Social Services, says the Jesuit schools tended to cater for Irish Catholics who owned small businesses. "The difference with say, the Christian Brothers, was that the Jesuits charged fees," he says. While the Christian Brothers and other Catholic orders concentrated on educating their working-class charges up in the world - their products hard-charged the ranks of the public service - the Jesuits drew a bead on parents from the mercantile class and lately the professions.

For more than 100 years, through a mixture of educational excellence, snobbery, astute appreciation of societal changes and high fees, the Jesuits retained a stranglehold on shaping the intellectual development of the sons of well-to-do Australian Catholics. The grip may be strongest in Melbourne, where old-school ties remain a useful social lever. With Geelong College, Geelong Grammar, Melbourne Grammar, Scotch College and Wesley College, Xavier was a founding member of Associated Public Schools, based on the English public-school tradition. Jesuits also saw the future was tertiary education, in 1918 opening Newman College, one of University of Melbourne's halls of residence.

The big Jesuit schools effectively guaranteed a high university entrance rate. Recalcitrant boys were winnowed out at the end of the penultimate year of school to give matriculants a clear run. "Medicine and law were the big ticket items," one old boy recalls. "But the grail was real estate ... that's meant to be a joke. Of course, the rest of us were expected to work in the family company, or on the family farm. Some even took up religious vocations."

The ranks of law, medicine and the higher echelons of commerce are filled with Jesuit products. While Macquarie Bank's Nicholas Moore enjoyed a brilliant career, not all old Ignatians shine: Jock Palfreeman is doing time in a Bulgarian jail for murder; stockbroker John Hartman was jailed for insider trading.

Jesuits divide their work in Australia between pastoral care and education. In 2011, pressure to better address social justice issues led to the opening of Jarjum College in Redfern. It was the first new Jesuit school in 60 years and catered to disadvantaged students who could not attend classes regularly. In recent years, the Jesuits have also embraced coeducation.

Other orders had traditionally catered for parents who traditionally voted Labor and later, Democratic Labor. Parents at Jesuits schools were early participants in the Catholic flight to the conservatives.

In 1966 Phillip Lynch, a Xavier old boy, reputedly became the first practising Catholic elected as a Liberal MP in Robert Menzies' largely Protestant party. Eventually he was to become Malcolm Fraser's treasurer and the deputy leader of the Libs. Another old Xavierian, Tim Fischer, led the Nationals, and was a deputy prime minister. And of course, Nick Greiner, an old Ignatian, led the NSW Liberals into power in 1988.

None of these men displayed overt signs of their Jesuit upbringings. But Abbott's Coalition ministry is shaping as a kind of Jesuit jamboree. Not only are he and Joyce old Ignatians, but Joe Hockey is a product of St Aloysius' College, Christopher Pyne attended St Ignatius' College, Adelaide, and Kevin Andrews lived at Newman while studying law and arts at Melbourne University.

Exceptions, of course prove the rule: Bill Shorten, a self-appointed Labor leader-in-waiting, is an old Xavierian.

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